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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MAPUTO 000919

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MZ](#)

SUBJECT: PARTY-VOTER DISCONNECT ENGENDERS GRASSROOT CHANGE

REF: A. MAPUTO 846

[1](#)B. MAPUTO 901

[1](#)C. MAPUTO 791

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Todd C. Chapman for Reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (U) SUMMARY: There are indications that democracy may be taking greater hold at the grassroots level in Mozambique. The refusal of both major political parties to support the re-election of popular mayors in Maputo and Beira, the country's two largest cities, may be a serious miscalculation. Supporters of one incumbent, in an exercise of democratic process, easily gathered more than enough signatures to place his name on the ballot. An increase in the number of mayoral elections, where personal knowledge of local officials and their campaign promises leads to greater accountability at the ballot box, gives local democracy credibility. Leadership skills and democratic practices are honed in District Councils which determine the local distribution of funds received from the national government. Coupled with the apparent disconnect between the major parties and voters, these recent developments certainly make the upcoming municipal elections more interesting to watch; their outcome will be a helpful gauge with which to measure the state of Mozambican democracy, which seems to be developing, albeit slowly, from the grassroots up. END SUMMARY.

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BOTH PARTIES ABANDON POPULAR MAYORS  
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[1](#)2. (C) In strikingly similar actions, both major political parties in Mozambique, FRELIMO and RENAMO, recently declined to support highly popular mayors for re-election. FRELIMO's refusal to nominate incumbent Maputo Mayor Eneias Comiche (ref A) may be based in his refusal to support corruption schemes favored by senior party members. One Mozambican contact reported that Comiche was sacked when he refused to provide a building permit to the wealthy and politically connected Mohammed Bashir, a wealthy local businessman allegedly involved in the local drug trade. RENAMO party leader Alfonso Dhlakama purportedly made the decision personally not to nominate Daviz Simango in Beira--the sole major RENAMO city stronghold (ref B)--with the goal of eliminating a potential rival, though corruption conflicts may also have played a role.

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PEACEFUL ACTIONS FOR GRASSROOTS DEMOCRACY  
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[1](#)3. (U) Relatively peaceful local protests in support of Simango suggest that the community was prepared to take democracy into its own hands. Those who openly supported Simango were able to gather over 30,000 signatures in one week, more than twelve times the amount required for his name

to be placed on the ballot. (Note: There were fewer than 57,000 votes cast in the previous Beira municipal election. End note) That such a petition was organized and signed by such a sizeable number of eligible voters reflects a form of popular political determination rarely seen in Mozambique.

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ACCOUNTABILITY FACTORS IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT  
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¶4. (U) The constitutionally-mandated expansion of municipalities governed by locally elected mayors (unlike districts whose managers are appointed by the national government) also appears to be fostering the growth of democracy. Unlike national elections where the electorate rarely knows the individual who represents them, voters tend to know the local candidates and their programs. This accountability and sense that an ineffective leader can, at least theoretically, be peacefully removed, may be encouraging Mozambicans to take greater interest in and ownership of the election and political process, at least at the local level.

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DISTRICT COUNCILS AS TRAINING GROUND FOR DEMOCRACY  
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¶5. (C) The FRELIMO-controlled central government may have inadvertently fostered the growth of grassroots democracy through a national program that funnels grants of up to 7 million meticaïs (USD 280,000) to district administrators for use in local development projects (ref C). In order for the

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projects to be funded, they must be reviewed and approved by a village council made up of local citizens who are, in practice, FRELIMO members. FRELIMO may have assumed that the council members would remain loyal to FRELIMO so long as money continues to flow. However, those who have never participated in a democratic process are learning how to govern themselves, albeit at a simple level; a base of those skilled in democratic techniques is building, along with the belief that they have self-determination.

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COMMENT: PARTY SELF-INTEREST BOOMERANGS  
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¶6. (C) Leaders of the major political parties may have failed to recognize the growing strength of grassroots democracy in Mozambique. At least in these two mayoral races, they followed old patterns, imposing their will as they chose, assuming the rank and file would simply accept any candidate nominated. By failing to recognize the popularity of the two mayors, FRELIMO and RENAMO may have inadvertently weakened their own power by giving voters, who are learning to flex their muscles, a chance to organize and practice techniques that could lead to further decentralization of party power, or, potentially, to the growth of a significant third party. In many ways these recent developments make the upcoming municipal elections more interesting to watch; their outcomes will be a helpful gauge with which to measure the state of Mozambican democracy, which seems to be developing, albeit slowly, from the grassroots up.  
Chapman